

# BEST PRACTICES IN RECRUITMENT OUTREACH AND RETENTION



*Strategies for VA supervisors and managers  
to recruit, develop, and retain a  
competent, committed, and diverse workforce.*



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Diversity and Inclusion  
810 Vermont Ave. NW (06)  
Washington, DC 20420  
[www.diversity.hr.va.gov](http://www.diversity.hr.va.gov)  
[odi@va.gov](mailto:odi@va.gov)  
(202) 461-4131



## INTRODUCTION

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is committed to partnering with you in fostering a diverse, inclusive, and fair work environment in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Our vision is to help VA become a leader in the Federal community in the area of diversity and inclusiveness. There is more than a legal and ethical imperative to championing diversity and inclusion; there is a compelling business case. Empirical studies have shown a quantifiable positive correlation between workforce diversity and performance outcomes. Conversely, barriers to equal opportunity in the workplace result in costly attrition, liability, and low productivity.

VA faces significant challenges in the coming years from the changing demographic profile of our Nation and the related transformation of our labor force. To remain a high performing organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, agencies will be aggressively competing for the best talent and intellectual capital in a global market. We need to plan our recruitment and retention strategies creatively now in order to provide the best service to our veterans and their families.

In an effort to assist you in making meaningful progress in our diversity and human capital goals in VA, ODI met with the Administrations' EEO managers and compiled this compendium of "best practices" in recruitment outreach and retention from our own diversity community. This compendium reflects the recruitment outreach and retention strategies that have proven to be effective in advancing VA's strategic objective to "recruit, develop, and retain a competent, committed, and diverse workforce that provides high quality service to veterans and their families" (*VA Strategic Plan FY 2006-2011, Enabling Goal E, Objective E-1*).

We hope this guidance is helpful as you develop your individual plans. We genuinely hope to be partners and resources for you as we pursue our common aims of fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce to better serve our veterans and their families. If you have any questions, please contact Georgia Coffey, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office Of Diversity and Inclusion at 202-461-4131 or by e-mail at [odi@va.gov](mailto:odi@va.gov).



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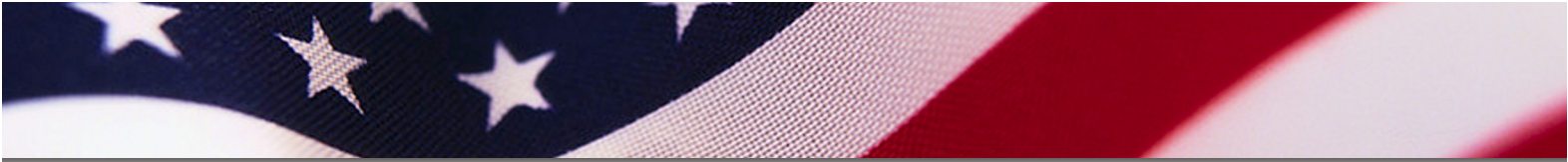
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## Recruitment Outreach

### *General External and Internal Recruitment Strategies*

- Contact faith-based organizations, such as local churches, and alliance groups in the area. These organizations have access to a large number of people, are in every community, are free, and will most likely welcome any information that can be offered to their congregation. Many faith-based organizations hold job fairs, health fairs, and informational fairs; set up a booth to share information about VA.
- Identify areas where targeted applicants visit (i.e. nurses: uniform store or medical equipment stores; caretaker: heavy equipment stores, Home Depot, gardening centers, etc.) and establish partnerships.
- Create a VA Recruitment and Outreach Coordinator position, which could monitor and share recruitment information with all three administrations and VACO.
- Create a national “recruitment and hiring manual” for field distribution that details how to recruit and outlines procedures and policies within VA relating to recruitment.
- Hold internal and external job informational fairs; oftentimes people within the organization are unaware of the needs of their workplace. These informational fairs help to inform the employee and encourage them to be informal recruiters for the organization. Sometimes shopping malls will allow agencies to set up an informational table.
- VA-wide acknowledgement of facilities that have excelled in recruitment; create a non-monetary “Diversity Recruitment Award” tailored to the needs of each facility.
- Have local EEO teams (EEO Manager, Supervisors, HR Specialists) participate in job and career fairs at local colleges and universities, military bases, and other establishments throughout the year.
- Partner with Healthcare providers. For example, Recruiting Military Healthcare Providers is a Healthcare Retention and Recruitment Office (HRRO) initiative which aims to increase VA’s ability to recruit healthcare providers, such as physicians, when they leave military service.
- Participate in local internship networking events.
- Partner with VA Public Affairs to help reach out to both VA and local communities.
- Provide VA visibility at career development centers within colleges and universities.
- Develop an internal recruitment tracking system.



## **Recruitment Outreach (CONT.)**

- Update and provide monthly diversity hiring metrics to appropriate staff.
- Provide workforce planning training.
- Expand use of employment referral program.
- Provide special hiring authorities training and periodic updates for Human Resources staff, managers, and supervisors.
- Participate in military transition assistance programs.
- Awareness Training – Provide VA leaders, managers, and supervisors with meaningful training that increases their awareness of the business, cultural, demographic, and legal frameworks for understanding and managing diversity. Include such training in leadership development programs and provide training to all employees in an effort to improve their understanding of diversity issues.
- Concentrate supervisory training on communications, interpersonal relations, and teambuilding skills.
- Conduct focus groups and exit surveys to assess the pulse of the workforce so as to implement proactive steps to diversity and recruitment success.
- Recruit current employees to counsel and coach other employees on career advancement, and also include a component on functional and geographic diversity.





## Recruitment Outreach (CONT.)

### *Strategies for Recruitment within the Veteran Community*

- Send vacancy announcements to recruitment programs at local military facilities and installations. For example, the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) at Fort Hood is able to post vacancy announcements on their bulletin board and distribute them to interested walk-ins.
- Attend and participate at local veteran recruitment job fairs.
- Work with VA's Veterans Employment Coordinator Service (VECS) in establishing efforts to attract, recruit and hire veterans into VA.

### *Special Hiring Authorities for Veterans:*

- 30 Percent or More Disabled Veterans
- Veterans Preference
- Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA)
- Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 (VEOA)
- National Defense Authorization Act of FY2006 (Public Law 109-163)

### *Employment Training Opportunities for Homeless Veterans*

- Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) – The All Faith Consortium has been selected to work with VA and the VA Grant and Per Diem Office to establish a 56-bed Transitional Housing Program for homeless veterans in the Washington, DC area. The program offers employment-focused training through a continuum of supportive services in the HVRP. This program is one of 34 in the nation and is anticipated to act as the model for all other programs of its type and employs a “bridge program” model that develops the homeless veterans skill set prerequisites for entry into and successful completion of a structured training program supported by an aggressive career services component.



## Recruitment Outreach (CONT.)

### *Strategies for Recruitment of Individuals with Disabilities*

- Provide training to all managers and supervisors in reasonable accommodation and selective placement, which would include how to effectively utilize special hiring authorities as a hiring vehicle.
- Establish a hiring goal for individuals with targeted disabilities by area VISN and MISN. Remember, VA's goal for individuals with targeted disabilities is to reach 2 percent of the Department total employee population by 2011.
- Fully utilize the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) as a vehicle to permanently employ qualified individuals with disabilities.
- Establish a collateral duty selective placement coordinator responsible for achieving the selected hiring goal in every Veterans Integrated Service Network, Memorial Integrated Service Network, and area throughout the VA system who would have a responsibility of working with prospective applicants.
- Collaborate with one-stop state vocational rehabilitation agencies, Social Security Administration's Local Ticket To Work Program, disabled student services offices at local universities, and local VBA, VR&E programs to identify additional qualified individuals with targeted disabilities.
- Partner with local facilities and workers' compensation program manager's to identify individuals currently receiving workers compensation who may be able to return to work.
- Participate and/or attend National Diversity Conferences, for example: Perspectives on Employment for Persons With Disabilities Conference, which is held annually during the month of December in Washington, DC.
- Participate at EARN—Employment Assistance and Recruiting Network events.

### *Special Hiring Authorities for Individuals with Disabilities:*

- Excepted Service Appointment of Persons with Disabilities  
New Regulation: Schedule A Authority, 5 CFR 213.3102 (u)
- VA Human Resources Management Letter No. 05-07-04 (HRML 05-07-04)



## Recruitment Outreach (CONT.)

### *Recruitment Strategies for Less Than Expected Representation*

- Establish a partnership with the chapters of national organizations such as the Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC); National IMAGE, Inc.; Federally Employed Women (FEW); and Blacks In Government (BIG) by forwarding a general letter identifying the local facility and point of contact. As vacancies are announced, include the chapters or organizations on the mailing list and visit their sites regularly, and attend their functions.
- Place ads in publications that focus on special emphasis groups (e.g., Hispanic serving newspapers such as *Hoy* and *CAREERS & the disABLED magazine*) to reach out to targeted groups. Reach out to other Hispanic medium such as local Hispanic television networks.
- Coordinate with Career Development Counselors and Veteran Employment Counselors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other Minority Serving Institutions.
- Participate in career fairs and site recruitment fairs for special emphasis groups. Reach out to associations, such as the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO); American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC); and Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) which support HBCUs, TCUs, and HSIs.
- Utilize other non-traditional internship programs, such as the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP). For a complete guide and description of non-traditional internship programs, visit [www.diversity.hr.va.gov](http://www.diversity.hr.va.gov) and select internships on the main page.






## Recruitment Outreach (CONT.)

### *Internships, Fellowships, and Other Work-Study Opportunities*

- **Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)** - The program provides a combination of work experience and formal study directly related to the participant's academic field. SCEP participants are considered interns and may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to permanent positions when they complete their schooling.
- **Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)** - The program provides temporary jobs for students, but these positions are not necessarily related to their course of study.
- **Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP)** - This intern program is designed to help agencies recruit and attract exceptional individuals into a variety of occupations. FCIP was created under Executive Order 13162, and is intended for positions at grade levels GS-5, 7, and 9. In general, individuals are appointed to a two year internship. Upon successful completion of the internship, the intern may be eligible for permanent placement within an agency.
- **Technical Career Field (TCF)** - This intern program recruits journeyman-level staff from colleges and universities to fill vacancies in technical career fields where current and future shortages are expected. Each intern is placed with an experienced preceptor in a VHA facility.
- **Presidential Management Fellows (PMF)** - This program is intended to create a flexible, customer-focused method for the recruitment and retention of top talent into the federal civil service, targeting the best and the brightest graduate programs from many of the nation's top colleges and universities.
- **VA Advanced Fellowships** - These post-residency fellowships—which number about 160 to 200 per year—are awarded to licensed and board certified or board eligible physicians to undertake study in emerging health specialties of particular importance to VA (for example, spinal cord injuries).
- **VA Learning Opportunities Residency** - This is a paid intern program to develop a well-trained talent pool from which to draw future employees.
- **Graduate Health Administration Training Program** - This program provides practical work experience to students and recent graduates of healthcare administration master's programs.
- **Cemetery Director Management Intern Program** – The Cemetery Director Management Intern Program offers individuals interested in becoming a Cemetery Director the opportunity to gain both technical and managerial skills to start them on their career path. The Cemetery Director Management Intern studies under the guidance and supervision of a Cemetery Director designated as a program Preceptor. This program is only the beginning of the learning process in the career development of a Cemetery Director.



## Retention Strategies

### *General Retention Strategies*

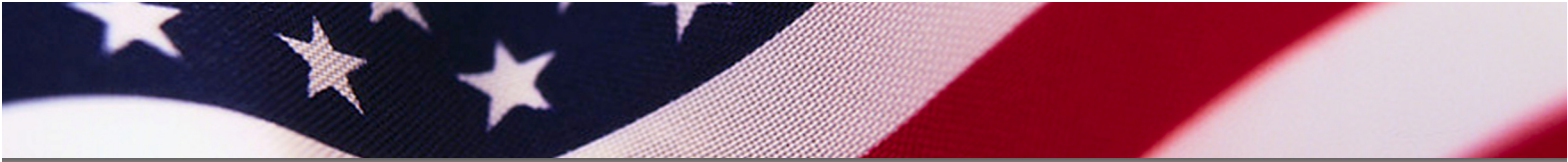
- Implement/expand mentorship programs within the organization.
- Expand the pool of upward mobility candidates to provide a cohort available to rapidly replace retiring senior employees.
- Develop metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of selected retention strategies.
- Examine attrition data to identify additional retention challenges to inform the development of long-term strategies.
- Update and provide monthly diversity hiring metrics to appropriate staff.
- Build on success of the High Performance Development Model by expanding its scope beyond VHA.
- Special Pay Rates and Other Flexibilities - VA hospitals conduct frequent salary studies in their respective area to keep pace with their local competitors.
- Flexible Work Schedules - Work schedules which include, allowing employees to work various work schedules during the biweekly pay period to assist in balancing work and family responsibilities.
- Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) - This is a competitive program designed to create qualified candidates for SES positions. The SESCO DP includes a variety of activities that prepare candidates for success as an SES and advances the goal of a "corporate SES," a diverse corps of career executives who share a Government-wide perspective. These executives share values and a common identity that reach beyond their individual professions or agencies and are well positioned to lead change both within their agencies and throughout Government.



## Retention Strategies (CONT.)

### *VA Training and Retention Programs*

- **Leadership VA Program** – This program is designed to identify leaders in VA who exhibit leadership talent and potential and to provide an enrichment of their career development through an intense leadership training experience.
- **Employee Incentive Scholarship Program** - This scholarship is open to employees who have been with VHA for at least one year and who are pursuing degrees or training in hard-to-fill healthcare occupations.
- **VA Nursing Education for Employees Program (VANEED)** - VANEED provides salary replacement dollars and funds to cover the cost of tuition, books and certain fees for employees enrolled in nursing education programs.
- **National Nursing Educational Initiative (NNEI)** - The target audience for NNEI is VA's registered nurses. NNEI provides funding so that RNs with associate degrees can obtain bachelor's degrees in nursing. This credential is necessary to advance beyond the entry nurse position.
- **VA Nursing Academy** - Established in April 2007, the VA Nursing Academy addresses the nationwide shortage of nurses. Under the program, qualified VA nurses are appointed to the nursing school faculties.
- **Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP)** - The Education Debt Reduction Program, implemented in 2002, is the title 38 version of the student loan repayment program available elsewhere in the federal government. EDRP allows VA to repay educational loans for newly appointed employees in difficult to fill positions.
- **VA Cadet Program** -The VA Cadet Program has the goal of getting high school students interested in healthcare careers. This program, is designed to allow VA to “grow” future employees.
- **VHA Executive Career Field Candidate Development Program (ECFCDDP)** - This program provides developmental opportunities for high-potential employees, grades GS-13-14/Nurse IV/ Physician Tier 2, preparing them to apply for executive vacancies. ECFCDDP is a two-year program with a program development plan, mentor and preceptor components, and includes a wide variety of educational and experiential learning opportunities.



## Retention Strategies (CONT.)

- **VHA Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, Development (LEAD)** - Anticipating shortages in leadership at all levels, VHA developed a framework based on the High Performance Development Model (HPDM) to identify a pool of high potential candidates at the VISN and facility levels to participate in leadership development programs. At the VISN level, candidates are selected at the GS 11-13 or Title 38 equivalent grade levels, and at the GS 7-11 or Wage Grade Supervisors/Title 38 equivalent grade levels at the facility level.
- **VBA Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD)** - Designed to help identify and develop the skills and talent of high-performing employees and enhance their preparation for leadership responsibilities in the future.
- **National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Leadership Institute** – This training initiative was developed as a means of providing in-house leadership development training to NCA staff members. The NCA Leadership Institute is modeled after VHA's LEAD – based programs and linked to the High Performance Development Model.
- **NCA Supervisory Training** – This program provides a comprehensive curriculum to new supervisors with an emphasis on HR policies and practices, EEO/Diversity issues and important initiatives that align with organizational goals and priorities.